

Ezra esteems fall as the ultimate season and the season of translators: the transmuting season. The Daphne season, and, here in New England, we're all about her leaves. It's also the season for the American Literary Translators Association conference. (And, speaking of metamorphosis, the new issue of the ever-rich *Metamorphoses* has been out for a couple of months.)

ALTA was the banquet of great writing that we've come to expect. Ez faves Edward Morin, Adam Sorkin, Alexis Levitin, Wendy Hardenberg, Donald Wellman and Mark Statman were there. Great panels, and some sparkling discoveries! Don Bogen's translation of Madrid poet Julio Mesanza (not out yet), and Arturo Mantecón's dazzling translations of Leopoldo María Panero (for example, *My Naked Brain*, Swan Scythe Press). We're also thrilled that Alexis Levitin's translation of Ana Minga's *Tobacco Dogs* is out this month (Bitter Oleander Press), and that he's in this issue.

In Rainer Schulte's interview with Salgado Maranhao and Alexis Levitin, the latter raises a point on which Ezra has long and bemusedly insisted: he says that a translation is never finished, and also remarks that there is no *mot juste*—it's more that, even in the constricted angles of a poem, there are many *mots justes*. Ezra wishes more readers were respectful of the multiple codes operating in any work of literature. If more editors and publishers thought this way not only the product but also the process of translation would gain in interest and stature.

There is a review (Willis Barnestone's *ABC of Translation*) in this issue. Also note our interview with Sylvie Kandé.

The issue is long; Ezra had promises to keep, and we wanted to get a large group of translators into calendar year 2013. We try to get work into print as scheduled. We also have a policy of notifying you about your submission within two weeks (usually one week between September and May).

FEATURED WRITER:

Sylvie Kandé is the author of three books, *Terres, urbanisme et architecture 'créoles' en Sierra Leone, 18ème-19ème siècles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), *Lagon, lagunes*, a text of poetic prose published in 2000 by Gallimard, with a postface by Édouard Glissant, and an epic, *La quête infinie de l'autre rive. Épopée en trois chants* (Gallimard, 2011) shortlisted for Prix Mahogany and Prix des Découvreurs. She is the editor of the proceedings of a conference she organized at NYU in 1997, under the title *Discours sur le métissage, identités métisses. En quête d'Ariel* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999). She also published with Marc

de Gouvenain *Le Pacte du serpent arc-en-ciel* (Actes Sud, 2002) the French translation of a collection of short stories by Aboriginal writer, Alexis Wright.

A member of the PEN American Center and the director of the collection “Mots et Mémoires” at Phoenix Press International, she teaches African Studies at SUNY Old Westbury.

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Sylvie Kandé (excerpts from *La Quête infinie de l'autre rive*, 2011)

~~translated by Peter Thompson

Alas we'll never raise a new Niani
we will not build a second Dakajalan
Spared we will be of the founding and its crimes:
our gods won't shove aside less fearsome gods
we'll not impose on a defiant land
—guests in the morning and by evening masters of all—
rough hands and our ways
But that doesn't mean we're a Mali in distress
concerned only to bewail the end of provisions:
instead an irrevocable dream
that would rather scuttle itself than surrender to reason
Champions our voyage was sweet:
it has just begun and will have no end
as we are the sea's chance
to discover its boundaries and each of its shores

In the third pinnacle
(the women's boat)
another custom rules
Four of them have slipped below the water line
to patch up the hull
Others in the rising water take their gourds and bail
Beneath an awning a lady fine
has her scorched hair put in braids and passes time
watching them massage her friend
while three little girls struggle to fish
She keeps to herself whose womb refuses every wish
and who offered up her youth and ordeal
against a debt not hers
from days gone by
Yea, even with the cracks and gaps
this third dug-out holds the waves to stand-off
as it plunges on and strives
Here they laugh and row and pray
Here they quip about the men
with every song that has a name
even ridiculing death
without the slightest shame

Here you are under way says the tout and have all the ocean
You see the first step is always the hardest
He goes off laughing with his pack full of coins

But none of us makes light of the devotion
of our mothers our sisters our lovers
they must have paid our lading dear
and they'll make necklaces from the sparkle of their tears
For each life drowned is a precious stone
to strew the ocean floor
The plenty and the want my children
(by girding her courage tight to her loins
he ends up hobbling her feet)
the plenty and the want go together evermore

I traduttori/traduttrici:

Alexis Levitin

Clifford Landers

Andrea Mickus

Christina Vega-Westhoff

Matthew Pfaff

Jennifer Croft

Alex McKeown

Julie Winter

Peter Webb and Irina Belyaninova

Michael Marsh-Soloway

Christopher Atamian

At The Prison

~~translated by Alex McKeown

These hours pass slow

Slow like a burial

You'll weep for this hour of woe

It'll leave us quick

Like all the hours we've known

La Tzigane

That gypsy knew before she could

Your life and mine caged in by night.

We payed her fee, thankful and polite,

But watched Hope flee from her burning wood—

Love would waltz if we told it to,

A performing bear is beaten but loose,

The beggars lost their prayers in a noose

That scraped the blue from the blue bird's hue.

So now we know. We're driving into hell.

But our hopes of love along the way

Refresh our minds of an early day

When a gypsy told us what she couldn't tell.

Voyage à Paris

What a wonderful thing

Leaving a gloomy southern Spring

For Paris

Paris Joli

Who one day

Love must have made

What a wonderful thing

Leaving a gloomy southern Spring

For Paris

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

Universal Soldier (this is a song; Ezra is assured that this “sings” as well as the original German!)

~~translated by Julie Winter

Every nation pledges its sons to fight on honor’s field

With weapon and helmet and proud uniform.

A good soldier’s language does not include a strong “No!” to wield

This word does not conform to the battle norm.

Some died for Adolf Hitler and for the German fatherland

America sent them to die in Vietnam.

Still unknown are those who dared to whisper the name of Stalin
All of them died for a different program.

One fought in the name of Christ, another fights for Mohammed
And grand speeches have replaced reason for all.
Still another destroys for ideas he does not understand
Is he blind, can't he see the writing on the wall?

No dead man has ever shed tears in front of the hero's tomb
And a fallen soldier knows no victory.
Whether they are black, yellow, red or white—one thing remains true
Each died in war for those more powerful than he.

A soldier is also a husband, a father and a son
He loves his mother, his wife, and his children.
It is insanity then that he can kill another one
Who is also loving, exactly like him.

When soldiers become brothers and together from war abstain
When across graves they reach each other their hand
Will it be possible for life on earth to become humane—
No more will we need a hero's wall to stand.

BETTINA WEGNER

The Bois de Vincennes (opening chapter)

~~translated by Christopher Atamian

1

The Bois de Vincennes extends from the Marne to the Don and even farther down, also covering a large part of the Black Sea. Sometimes it reaches the sky. It goes beyond my nostalgia and my memories. It glides over a utopian and unknown homeland. And on Sunday mornings and summer holidays, amidst the consecration of the clarity of the aurora borealis and the sap-colored quivering of its transparent trees, I am transported into the most extreme ecstasy. A ship sailing out of darkness. The grass overflows, extends pure and fresh, and speaks to me. The silent treetops balance themselves, capturing and diffusing light. Shadows lengthen. The air and the earth and the plants are like honey. And through the fleeting shredded clouds and the sad, vain flow of years gone by, I discover the meaning of my childhood excitement when drunk from the sea, I felt that vague emotion called hope.

But the Bois de Vincennes torments me as well. A tribunal: “Tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” My heart beats from anger and confusion. And then a rustling of the branches like a terror-filled murmur. A light is born like an electric current atop the trees. An explosion and then lightning. The shock between negative and positive forces, between child and man, between thinker and worker, exiled and assimilated, between the beautiful that leads to the ugly, and ugliness that moves me as well. The Bois de Vincennes leads me to the most violent contradiction. It becomes a crime-filled battleground. At times I walk at the bottom of a red sea, in the silence and the lights that attach themselves to my limbs. A sunken world. And the carmine ghost rising from its blood, transformed along with the same monstrous creatures. The sun shines red, the shadows red. At this time the smell of the trees, dizzying but tragic,

slowly becomes oppressive. The birds flee the silent darkness with *djinn*-like squawks. I can still hear the scraping of the guard's broom one cloudy day when he let me gather the gold of the dead leaves when I was without work. And one hears riding on the wind, the plaintive cry of the sweeper of illusions' wounded pride. The desolation of fall, beautiful in its decline. Occasionally a cart goes by full of chopped, scarred wood and then it slowly moves on like the one that used to pass by the train station in Rostov on days when a battle had raged, full of naked wet corpses, their eyes wide open. And the trees swaying in the wind and the lush grass that waves back and forth recall the ship of faith that used to sail up the long river of hope to always find itself at the foot of some virgin waterfall. Truth only makes you want to know deeper truth. Every revolution leads to another. Which is the genuine one? Sometimes I sit down, exhausted. In front of me lie the underground bunkers, protection against nighttime bombings, memories of the days when men lived like moles. In front of me, the abandoned military stations of the victorious troops. Misery. And in the vacuum, the city's low rumble.

NIGOGHOS SARAFIAN (born in Bulgaria—text in Western Armenian)

Untitled

~~translated by Michael Marsh-Soloway

Under the blue sky of her native country,

She languished, she withered...

She faded out at last and faithfully her young shadow

Has already flown over me;

But there are inaccessible features between us.

Vainly I roused the feeling:
I heard the news of her death from indifferent lips
And indifferently I heeded the message.
And so whom I loved with ardent soul,
With such heavy effort,
With such tenderness, exhausting grief,
With such craziness and torment!
Where is torture, where is love? Alas! In my soul
For the poor, credulous shadow,
For the sweet memories of irredeemable days,
I find neither tears, nor reproach.

ALEKSANDR PUSHKIN

Untitled

For the shores of the distant fatherland
You abandoned the foreign territory;
In one unforgettable hour, one wistful hour,
I cried a long time before you.
My hands, growing cold,
Attempted to hold you, but
The terrible weariness of separation,
My groan prayed not to interrupt.

But you tore your lips
Away from the bitter kiss, and
From the extreme of dark exile,
You summoned me to another land.
You said, “The day we meet again,
Under the eternally blue sky,
Kisses of love in the shade of olive trees,
We once more, my friend, will reunite.”

But there, alas, where the arches of the sky
Shine in blue brilliance,
Where the shade of olive trees lay over water,
You fell asleep with a final dream.
Your beauty, your suffering,
Disappeared in a sepulchral urn—
And with them, the kiss of our next meeting...
But I wait for it, it waits for you.

PUSHKIN

MORNING

~~translated by Peter Webb and Irina Belyaninova

Sadness dwells within your soul:
An illness never rare to find.

Poverty consumes us whole
And even nature feels the grind.

The wretchedness is infinite
In pastures, fields, and meadows bleak,
The wet and sleepy jackdaws sit,
Gathered on a haystack's peak;

A drunken peasant on a skinny nag,
Which canters at a painful gait,
Heads deep into the dense blue fog,
A sky so dull... one mourns its fate!

But the wealthy city is also troubled:
The same clouds run across the sky;
For tortured nerves—an iron shovel
Scrapes the roadway hard and dry.

The workday beckons everywhere;
The alarm sounds in the fire tower;
A man is driven to the infamous square
At the executioner's hour.

A prostitute whom dawn has clad
Hurries as she quits a bed;
Officers in a hansom cab

Gallop from town: a duel's ahead.

The merchants, all at once, arise

And rush to counters to sit and deal:

All day long the scales provide

The measure of an evening meal.

Hear the thunder of the fortress guns!

The capital's threatened by a flood...

Someone died: a scarlet cushion

Bears Anna's medal of chivalric blood.

A yardman pounds a thief—he's caught!

As geese are chased to the butcher's knife;

From an upper floor—a shot:

Someone has taken his own life.

NICHOLAY NEKRASOV

Panama

~~translated by Christina Vega-Westhoff

“They’ve arrived,” Captain Don Juan Perez de Guzman would have dryly said when they confirmed what he already knew. Morgan and his army had crossed the jungle hungry and tired

to Panama after taking Fort San Lorenzo. The Spanish never thought the English would withstand the sun, humidity, mud, lack of provisions, toads, mosquitoes, alligators, fevers, and the Chagres River. But there they were, taking over the city. Some say that it was Don Guzman who gave the order to burn the city before leaving; others that it was the same Morgan who later blamed the Spaniards; and still others suggest that it was accidental, that the people, to leave the English nothing, burned it. I believe that the city itself, in a gesture of pyrophoric audacity, discovered a way into history without the riches of Babylon, the combative sprit of Carthage, or the power of Rome.

MELANIE TAYLOR (Panama, contemporary)

Pendulum

Match

I will pretend to be humble even though my spirit is restless. I will pretend I cook even though I hate chopping parsley. I will pretend to be someone else to anchor you with me.

Mismatch

You molded me to your will like clay. You told me how to be. You tattooed your desires on my pupils and now you want to leave me. You are bored, I know, I belong to you too much.

MELANIE TAYLOR

Untitled series

~~translated by Jennifer Croft

1.

I am twenty-three years old

but today I played in the sea

like I was ten, eleven

at best.

I blasted through the waves until I reached the shore

and then I went back in
leaping over the foam.
More than once I stumbled
upon some pits of sand
that stretched out underwater.
The sea here is tepid
and if I was completely underwater I could escape
the wind from the coast.
Dad stayed on the shore
without taking off his shirt,
with his black glasses on.
He was standing with his legs apart
at the width of his shoulders
and his hands together behind his back,
on his belt.
Every so often he would move his arms
to give me signals that I come up.
The sea was rough, and when I wasn't trying,
the current, very slowly,
carried me out.

2.

Two kids hide
underneath the waves
from their dad's sight.

One is a teenager, and the other is
less than twelve years old.

When the sea foam retreats
they barely lift their heads
to breathe and see the man
getting anxious on the beach.

From his lounge chair, blocking the sun
with the palm of his hand,
he tries to see them
on the horizon.

I did it too,
one summer in Pinamar
before I started junior high.

Dad got upset and I was grounded
for the three days we had left of our vacation,
stuck in an apartment
that didn't have A.C.

My parents and the girls would get in at noon
to eat on the balcony.

We would all have lunch together, and they
would go back to the beach.

On my headphones the noise of the water
gets tangled up with a song by the Beatles,
but I can't remember the name.

McCartney's soft voice tells someone to please
step inside his house.

Now the guy comes running into the water,
darting around the people on the shore.

The two kids laugh
just on the other side
of where the waves break.

3.

It's winter, and although it's hot
it gets dark early.

Today at four o'clock in the afternoon the sun
had already quit shining on the coast.

The only person left in the sea was a surfer girl
sitting on her board.

She had her legs in the water
up to her knees.

Her blond hair slicked back, damp,
looked like it was glued
to her wetsuit.

4.

At night we go out for a walk
along the coastal highway.

It's hot, and on the beach side
there's not even any breeze.

The stones on the ground are white, and they're decorated
by circles in colored paving stones.

They're on vacation here,
And the pedestrian area fills with people
all the way to the part with the restaurants.

There are also artisans and painters
that sell their prints on the street.

On the sea they always sketch
little wooden boats
but so far while I've been here
I haven't seen a single one.

Other people sell tours
to go and see the sand dunes
or go swimming with the dolphins.

In among the electric wires in the sky
bats flutter.

"It's because of the heat,"

Dad says.

"I never saw so many of them
as that time in Seville,"

Mom says.

I walk faster
without looking up,
and my sister asks further on
what the price is of a bracelet.

5.

While we wait for a flight
that's been delayed to land
the Argentines start to gather
in front of Gate Eight.
Behind me, a man notes
with astonishment
that he saw costing eighty pesos
the wine that he buys in Buenos Aires
for thirty-five per bottle.

6.

We came thousands of kilometers
to get away from the cold.
And we did it. What do we take away from this?
We have sunburns
and highlights in our hair.
I packed two kilos of cashews
covered in caramel.
We can still

look each other in the eye.

Talking over dinner I expounded heatedly
upon an idea for a doctoral dissertation
that I am never going to write.

Mom was listening to me attentively and Dad
asked several questions when I got done.

The plane that brought us back
passed through a large area of turbulence.

Outside it was dark, and out the window
you couldn't see anything but the intermittent light
of one of the wings.

Next to me a guy started reading
the safety precautions that the airline provides.

My little sister muttered, glancing at him out of the corner of her eye,
what an idiot.

LUCAS MERTEHIKIAN (Argentina, contemporary)

Jonah

~~translated by Andrea Mickus

Two seagulls land
on the back of the whale
that woke up on the shore.
The foam of the retreating waves
sinks furrows around
the enormous body
that breathes with difficulty.
When the onlookers
come close to touch it,
the gulls take off.

as if to keep me company.

today it's enough to imagine animals.
give them little pet names
and poison them before the sun comes up

LUIS CHAVES

XIII

~~translated by Alexis Levitin

Dead man cherisher of God
your vultures chase me down.

The phantom fridge
speaks electric through the night.

A navel falls before the traffic light.

There are no longer any watching shadows.

My vagrant head
warns you not to fall asleep too soon
for with this business of the bed
they're teaching us the proper way to use our coffin.

Dead man cherisher of God
I've freed myself from him
I like life with birds at the back of the room of shackles.

Dead man nearly six feet tall

my fabled monster
you're the deadest one in your family.

Dead man deaf
moths are beginning to eat my memory
I no longer know which was the corner of my attentive eye

I don't know in which hand peace may be with you
I threw my name away
I don't remember when
I'm supposed to take my pills.

Dead as always
you no longer have cardinal points.

Dead man cherisher of God
the thief hanging to your right
can no longer save you
or even bring you back to childhood
so you can play hop-scotch
on my crooked squares.

ANA MINGA

XVI

That day you began to grow silent

my father in his box of clothes
brought along the breath of buried lovers.

Silent I knew
how the femur crackles beneath the leaves.

This month
that father of mine will leave behind those Sumpa lovers
escape his sores
and beneath his arm will carry their remains
while I carry through the streets
your son here in my brain.

ANA MINGA

Sappho 27

~~translated by Matthew Pfaff

“for mortals, there is one way...”

you were a young girl, once.
now we walk to the bitter-

sweet wedding:

send off

the young women quickly;

sing out

this moment as song:

don't hold back the gifts
of the Muses, girls:

may the gods make a way, though narrow,
to Olympus' heights
for mortals.

Sappho 81

But you, Dica, weave together anise
stems with fingers
supple; bind
back hair with garlands
sweet: the blessed
Charites turn to the one
wearing flowers;
hide their faces from
the uncrowned.

SAPPHO

Kisses on the Cheek

~~translated by Clifford Landers

“Your bladder will have to be removed entirely,” Roberto said. “And in these cases a place is prepared for the urine to be stored before it’s excreted. A part of your intestine will be converted into a small sac, connected to the ureters. The urine from that receptacle will be directed to a bag placed in an opening in your abdominal wall. I’m describing the procedure in layman’s terms so you can understand. The bag will be hidden by your clothes and will have to be emptied periodically. Have I been clear?”

“Yes,” I replied, lighting a cigarette.

“I’d like to schedule the surgery immediately following the tests I’m asking for. Did I tell you about the relationship between bladder cancer and smoking?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Three out of five cases of bladder cancer are linked to smoking. The link between smoking and bladder cancer is especially strong among men.”

“I promise I’ll stop smoking.”

“This year, worldwide, there will be close to three hundred thousand cases of bladder cancer.”

“Really?”

“It’s the fourth most common type of cancer and the seventh leading cause of death from cancer.”

I felt like telling Roberto to stop bugging me, but besides being my doctor he was also my friend.

“Bladder cancer,” he continued, “can occur at any age, but it usually hits people over fifty. You’ll be fifty next month. You’re a month older than me.”

“I’m late for an appointment. I have to go, Roberto.”

“Don’t forget to have the tests done.”

I ran out. I didn’t have any appointment. I wanted to smoke another cigarette in peace. And I also needed to meet with someone who could get me a gun. I thought of my brother.

I phoned him.

“Do you still have that weapon?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Want to sell it?”

“No.”

“Aren’t you afraid one of your children will find the gun and shoot the other one in the head? Something like that happened the other day. It was in the papers.”

“My gun is locked inside a drawer.”

“According to the paper, so was that poor guy’s.”

“I didn’t read anything about it.”

“You always say you only read the headlines. That didn’t make the headlines because it happens every day.”

“And just how did it happen?”

“The boy was playing cowboys and Indians with his brother and the tragedy occurred. Any day now I’m going to read in the newspaper that one nephew of mine killed the other playing a game.”

“Enough with the foreboding.”

“I’ll stop by there tonight.”

When I got to my brother’s house he said, “Take a look at this drawer. You think a couple of kids could break that lock?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“Want to see me break into that piece of shit?”

“You’re an adult.”

“Where’s Helena?”

“In the bedroom.”

“Have her come out here.”

I told his wife about the article in the newspaper, which I had made up.

“I’m constantly asking Carlos to get rid of that damned thing, but he won’t listen,” said Helena.

“I came here to buy the revolver, but this idiot doesn’t want to sell.”

“What are you going to do with the gun?” Carlos asked.

“Nothing. Own it, that’s all. I’ve always wanted a revolver.”

Helena and my brother argued for a time. She won the debate when she said that one of the boys could get hold of the key while my brother was sleeping, or when he forgot the key in a place where the kids could find it, or on some other occasion. Finally, Carlos opened the drawer and took out the gun.

“And to make things worse, you keep the thing loaded,” I said, after examining the firearm.

“You irresponsible lunatic,” said Helena, furious, “you always told me the revolver wasn’t loaded. Listen, let your brother take that piece of crap with him, now. Otherwise I’m moving out and taking the children.”

I got the revolver and went back to my apartment. I phoned my girlfriend. I felt like going to the bathroom but knew I’d see signs of blood in the urine, which always sent a shiver down my spine. That could spoil my time with her. I urinated with my eyes closed and, also with my eyes closed, flushed the toilet several times.

While I was waiting for my girlfriend I thought about the future, smoking and drinking whiskey. I was going to spend the rest of my life filling with urine a bag stuck to my body, which would then have to be emptied somehow or other. How could I go to the beach? How could I make love to a woman? I imagined the horror she would feel upon seeing that thing.

My girlfriend arrived and we went to bed.

“You’re worried about something,” she said, after a time.

“I’m not feeling well.”

“Don’t worry, sweetheart, we can just talk; I love talking with you.”

This is one of the worst phrases a man can hear when he’s naked with a naked woman in bed.

We got up and got dressed without looking at each other. We went into the living room. We talked a little. My girlfriend looked at her watch, said, “I have to go, love,” kissed me on the cheek, left, and I shot myself in the chest.

But the story doesn’t end there. I should have shot myself in the head, but it was in the chest and I didn’t die.

During my convalescence, Roberto came to see me several times to say we didn’t have much time, but we could still do the bladder surgery, successfully.

It was done. Now I easily empty the urine bag. It’s well hidden under my clothes, no one realizes it’s there, over my abdomen. The cancer appears to have been entirely eliminated. I no longer have a girlfriend and I’m addicted to crossword puzzles. I stopped going to the beach. I did go once, to throw the gun into the sea.

RUBEM FONSECA

BOOK REVIEW:

ABC of TRANSLATION, Willis Barnstone. Black Widow (Commonwealth Books), 2013. 101 pages.

Mr. Barnstone needs very little introduction, especially in these pages. The author of well-known translations such as those of Rilke and Saint John of the Cross, he is also importantly, for our current purpose, a literary critic and a poet (at least sixteen titles). No one is more authoritative in speaking to translators; this book will at times startle non-translators, but here, too, Barnstone's authority serves to convince.

A shorter version of this compendium, with notes, poems and epigrams under each letter, A to Z, came at the end of Barnstone's magisterial *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory and Practice* (Yale, 1993).

Who is this book for? If it had been written only for other translators it might come off as a bit of a mutual admiration exercise. It's much more interesting—and practically this is the case—to see how it works for a wider audience. Viewed this way, it is an apologia—and a necessary one, despite the recent rise in translation's fortunes. Viewed the former way, one might think there are too many explanations of "what translation is." Translators instinctively recognize that it is "dancing in chains," and that a "translator... gambles on gains to balance her losses," or what it is to "give a cliché new life." But things get much more interesting, in the early pages, with the often-repeated suggestion of grace: "To return grace with grace is the aesthetic secret/of translation." Here we are explaining (interestingly, I suggest, to a non-translator) what motivates us, what the goal of it all is, and why the more renowned (and notorious) comments about translation make sense.

The book has an index—a treasure trove, dazzling in juxtapositions. Here is another "what translation is" moment; under "translation" there are seventeen entries like these: "as bastard child," "as lexical shock," "as knowing your author." This *ABC* is, more than anything, an enumeration of, and a reflection on, definitions, and its strength is the depth of theory and praxis such definitions reveal. "In translation perfect mimesis is impossible./Difference is everywhere." This reminds us of the most profound straining after meaning—that is, how words mean anything at all—in Derrida and Wittgenstein. "The translator is a writer with arguments against

archaisms.” Here Barnstone advances the cause of many practitioners who have been criticized for modernizing. Even more bold: “the translator robs the past,” and “The theft is silken.” And here, as we address what the translator is “robbing,” and echo several comments about the “grace” of the whole business, we get to the important stuff.

In speaking of music, Barnstone begins to make clear how much of all art is translation—how many of the critics of translation are themselves translators of a sort. “. . . a *redemptive* translator is a musician/Who interprets notes on a staff into sound.” Here, as with notes on “originality” and “spirit,” we begin intuitively to see translation as high art because it does what all art does. It mediates, imperfectly, between forms, inner and outer states, visions. Indeed, imperfection is tackled head-on: “The transfer dwells in imperfection. . .” Only artists who have long practice can also have this transcendent view of imperfection—of the imperfect translation that besets any artistic process. This is the heart of the matter. And now Baudelaire, magnificently, makes his entrance in “Translatio: Big Mover of The Seas.” Calling translation a voyage, Barnstone invokes the French poet’s “L’Invitation au voyage,” and this situates the argumentum both in the sweet spot of the modern sense of poetry and in the widest sense of our definition of art. We cannot help thinking of Baudelaire’s “*correspondances*” between visual, auditory, olfactory senses, and of what this suggested to him not only about metaphor but about expressing one art through another. (And we’re thinking of his career as a translator!) If voyage is *moving between*, then translation, more than other arts, evokes the space between, the richness of possibility on the open sea, and the risk of imperfection as a necessary part of the bold venture.

ABC is followed by some very thoughtful notes, and is blessed with the author’s own illustrations.

~~Peter Thompson

Interview With Sylvie Kandé

EZRA: First of all, I wonder how often you get back to Senegal, and what your impressions are. I’m also curious if your new book (*La Quête infinie de l’autre rive*) takes its imaginary “departure” from Senegal, or from West Africa generally?

SK: I could say that I go to Senegal either “regularly” or “not often enough.” But what matters is that my first trip to Senegal took place at a crucial juncture in my personal process of identity and imaginary self-fashioning. Born in France during the Algerian war, I had experienced in my Parisian *banlieue* numerous social tensions directly linked to the dismantlement of the French colonial empire. It was reassuring to know that another system of references (another network of relatives, a pool of different values, a trove of new images and words) was available to me, far

away from my too often hostile daily reality. For instance at that time, the term *métis/métisse* did not have the same connotations at all in both places: how exhilarating it was to feel free in Senegal of what was elsewhere constructed as a social handicap! It took me a few more trips to Africa to understand that if I belonged there, it was in another, marginal and unorthodox way. And I like it like that!

In *La Quête infinie de l'autre rive*, I imagine the hypothetical Atlantic crossing led by the 14th-century Malinke emperor Abubakar II aka Bata Manden Bori. Given the size of the medieval Mali Empire, such an expedition probably mobilized people from all over West Africa, and I have tried to account for this rich diversity in my poem. The few historians (Van Sertima, among others) who studied the feasibility of the Malinke expedition hypothesized that it left from the mouth of the Senegal or the Gambia River. As far as I am concerned, I have it depart from the Casamance River, in order to establish a parallel with the contemporary trips undertaken by undocumented migrants who leave the Senegalese coast on small boats to enter Europe in search of work. Recently, the patrols have indeed forced these boats to take off from the southern shores of the country. It is also possible that in some way I wanted to tie myself to the narrative, since my paternal family is from Casamance, a southern and excentered region of Senegal.

EZRA: Speaking of the Algerian war, I have recently been working with two Algerians—Réda Bensmaïa and Nabile Farès—who write very subtly about issues of identity in the post-colonial world. That is, they write in a way that is non-dogmatic, non-victimized, to open up all the possibilities that exist—really exist, in people's lives—in this context. Do you think issues of identity (to avoid the phrase “identity politics”) can continue to be rich, even poetic, terrain for artists in Africa?

SK: In an essay he wrote on Nabile Farès, Réda Bensmaïa suggested that the writer's ambition was “not to set Kabyle demands against Algerians as a homogeneous block, as the values of an ‘endangered’ or ‘dispossessed’ minority, but rather to involve Algerians in a *becoming-minoritarian* that corresponds far better to their own historicity.” *Mutatis mutandis*, this analysis is useful to understand the *métisse* experience in France. While *métissage* was, well into the 1970s, an unwelcome reminiscence of the colonial ties, this concept came to be perceived, from the mid-80s on, as the best suited, in a post-structuralist, post-colonial era, to express the clash and overlapping between racial identities, communities and nation, the masculine and the feminine, writing and reading practices, etc. Soon, droves of people began claiming a “*métisse*” identity, and the celebration of *métissage* has since become a staple of the dominant discourse. However generous these declarations may be, what is missing here is the individual or institutional involvement in the critical and risky process referred to by Deleuze and Guattari, Farès and Bensamaïa as “*becoming minority*.” Consequently, the opportunity has been missed to reassess the complex meaning of Frenchness by deconstructing its alleged homogeneity, and challenging the simplistic view of a national majoritarian identity threatened by fragmentation because of the presence of communities refractory to integration within the national borders. In *Lagon, lagunes*, a fiction published in 2000, I emphasized the subversive potential of *métissage*:

always already here, it precludes the pre-existence of distinct racial entities, and teaches us to read the world in full knowledge of, yet beyond the ideology of race. But *métissage* can also be a highly aestheticized *alibi* not to discuss what is, at least in Europe, its pre-condition: immigration. It is probably not by chance that *La quête infinie de l'autre rive*, published ten years later, revolves around the predicament of undocumented migrants.

EZRA: Since we are engaged in a translation project for Transition Magazine—and for other reasons, too—let me suggest that a certain “betweenness” of *languages*, a linguistic *métissage*, can be an opening not only to artistic possibilities but to the social or political spaces you are talking about. And I stress that I intend this betweenness in all the poetic ways that it could develop, beyond the classic postulates of the African “language question.”

SK: More often than not, poetry is concerned with analogy, thus “betweenness”. Establishing a connection between signs and sense, deciphering palimpsests, or collapsing various times, places and modes onto the page is its business. Moreover, in the last decades, the French language, notorious for its protectionism, has opened itself, under the push of the Francophone writers, to a whole array of linguistic novelties. Not only did the term “Négritude,” coined by Césaire, make its way into the dictionary, but authors such as Ahmadou Kourouma or Patrick Chamoiseau invented an “interlangue” (between Malinke and French, or Creole and French, for instance), and wrote masterpieces from that particular location. As for me, I wanted to create a literary form that would in and of itself tell a story. In *Lagon, lagunes*, I wrote in both formal French and in slang, and I laced the mixture with terms and tropes from Bretagne (where my maternal grandmother was born) or from Senegambia. I wanted this language to be reflective of the many conversations I had with family and friends, because there were the main site where my *métissage* was defined and debated. If the poem is replete with quotes, this is to account for the fact that my experience of the world is constantly mediated by the poetic snippets I memorized. In *La quête infinie de l'autre rive*, as I described Abubakar’s 14th-century expedition, then African migrants’ journey towards Europe, I used an old French that I invented, borrowing in part from Montaigne’s lexicon, then switched to a contemporary one. In the two first cantos, I applied the lexicon usually reserved to medieval Europe and its nobility to describe the Mali empire – a linguistic strategy geared towards subverting stereotypes of Africa, and harking back to a pre-transatlantic-slave-trade imagination of Africa. We know for instance that, on his 1375 Catalan Atlas, the cartographer Abraham Cresques painted Mansa Musa, the emperor of Mali, in full regalia and a gold nugget in his hand, suggesting through visual clues that Africa had both politics and wealth.

EZRA: A final question about history and literature. What you’ve just said makes me think of all the work that Cheikh Anta Diop did, and that his foundation still does (the I.F.A.N. renamed for Diop). And I’ve just been talking with Mbulelo Mzamane about his encyclopedia and his new Center for African Literature Studies. Are you encouraged by these efforts in Africa—or do you think they need wider participation and support, particularly among younger Africans?

SK: To the efforts of the pan-Africanist luminaries you mentioned, we could add those of historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo, to whom I dedicated *La quête infinie de l'autre rive*, and those of rapper and film maker Didier Awadi, whom I quoted as well in the poem's epigraph. The title of Awadi's latest documentary "The Lion's Perspective" takes its cues from a well-known proverb: "Until the lions have their own storytellers, the hunter will always have the best part of the story." It revolves around the issue of immigration, which, according to Awadi, summarizes Africa's long plight. We probably all share the idea that freedom resides in the way we preserve our stories, and in the way we narrate history: similarities and contrasts between past and current situations, metaphors and symbols that liberate the imaginary. We need to relate to one another in another way, beyond the dichotomy us/them -- a enormously complex and exciting endeavour that poet Édouard Glissant called "Poétique de la Relation." Support is needed, not only from younger Africans, but from all those who are ready to take the risk of "becoming lion."

EZRA: Thank you, both for this conversation and for "the infinite quest."

